

L E T T E R

F R O M

A Gentleman in the Country,

T O

A Member of Parliament, with a Speech inclosed, to be delivered in the House before the Prorogation or Dissolution of the Parliament.

S I R,



HAVE sent You the Inclosed Speeck, to be delivered by You, or some such Man of Honour and Courage, as I know You are, if any such be in the House. It contains Nothing but Truth, and what we all know to be the general Sense of the Nation, who will not easily be bubled out of their Rights and Priviledges, by a corrupt Ministry and Corrupt Parliament. There is one Thing further to be suggested to the House, as being the Sense of the Nation too; and that is concerning Elections of Members of Parliament. We have

indeed very good Laws against Bribery, and unfair Returns of Members elected: But Laws signifie Nothing, if they are eluded and not put in Execution. The whole Nation is very sensible how the last Elections were Carried, and what vast Sums of of the publick Money were expended in the Elections contrar to Law, and what a fine Parliament such Representatives have made. I believe the Electors will not be so easily catch'd with such trifling Baits hereafter; But for the publick Good, and preventing such vile Practices in Time coming, I wish the former Laws concerning Elections may be ratified and confirmed by a new Act, with the Addition of Infamy to such as shall be found guilty of such Practices. And in the last Place, the Nation expects, That both Houses will present an humble Address to His Majesty, That he would be pleased to dissolve this Parliament immediately, and call a new one, a full and free Parliament to meet with all convenient Speed. I am,

S I R,

Your's &c.

Philobritannus.

Mr. Speaker,

I HAVE a Motion to make of great Importance, and in Order to satisfy the House of the Reasonableness of what I have to say, I beg Leave to speak fully and freely to the Point, and to be heard with Patience and Attention.

We all seem to be zealous for the Constitution, for the Legislative, for the Rights and Priviledges of Parliament; and what *Englishman* that has Soul or Sense in him, will not be zealous for our Excellent well tempered Constitution? the Firmness and Strength of which, consists in Unanimity and Steadiness of Councils, in pursuing the publick Interests with Truth and Righteousness, without any private Views and partial Considerations. When these take Place, and Men bandy

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themselves into Factions and Parties for supporting themselves, and prosecuting their own little vile Ends, without any further View than to make the Publick subservient to their particular Interests, the Ruin of the Constitution is unavoidable: And then those Parties themselves cannot miss of being involved in the general Calamity. When the House is pull'd down, every Beam and Stone of it must go to the Ground. We have many sad Instances of the Truth of this in all Ages and Nations, and one very late in our own, the dire Effects of the grand Rebellion, the History of which is well enough known; from which I shall only put the House in Mind of a few Things, which stand as Beacons to all Ages, to warn us, That we run not upon the same Shelves and Rocks, which then broke the Ship, and ruined the Government.

We all know what the Constitution was before the Grand Rebellion, That it was an Hereditary Monarchy, the supreme Imperial Power being lodged in the King, who was bound by his solemn Oath to GOD, to govern according to the standing Laws of the Land, which Laws were made by the King with the Advice & Consent of the Lords Spiritual & Temporal; & Commons in Parliament assembled, without whose Advice & Consent no Law could be made nor abrogated, nor any Taxes imposed. This Constitution had continued with very little Variations, from the Days of King Henry the 6th. who made that famous Ordinance: Our Lord the King hath ordained, That Knights of Shires be chosen by People dwelling in the Counties, every one of them having Lands or Tenements, to the Value of forty Shillings *per Annum* at least, and that he who is chosen be dwelling within the County where he is elected. King Henry the 8th. indeed made three Laws, and that with Consent of Parliament too. 1st. That the King's Proclamations should be Equivalent to Laws. 2dly. That Queen Elizabeth was illegitimate. 3dly. That the King in his Will might name whom he pleased to be his Successor. But our Kings who succeeded him, as tyrannical as some would make them, never arrogated to themselves such Extravagant Powers; and these Statutes notwithstanding the Succession in the right Line was not interrupted, and our Constitution and Government continued firm and regular, till the Reign of King Charles 1st. of blessed Memory, whose Counsellors being veing very unfaithful to him, made his Government very unsteady; Parliaments were frequently called, and as often dissolved without finishing any Business, and for a long Time together none at all were called. At last the Scotch Covenanters in Correspondence with the Dissenters and Malcontents in England, brought on the Parliament 1641. and then for preventing such long Intermiſſions of Parliaments in Time coming, a Bill for triennial Parliaments was brought in and past into a Law, the most useful and excellent Improvement of our Constitution that ever England saw: Which if it had been moderately and wisely managed by that Parliament, might have prevented all that Misery and Desolation, which followed upon their Abuse it, and made the Kingdom ease and happy under the Government of that Excellent and Religious Prince. But so gracious a Concession could not serve the Purposes of those Demagogues, who had got the Ascendant of that Parliament. Nothing less could serve than a perpetual Parliament, or rather House of Commons, who, having wrested the Sword out of King's Hand, and usurped all the Parts of the Parts of the Prerogative and Royalty, declared themselves to be the Parliament and supreme Power, without King or Lords. But enough of that, I shall only observe, That our Constitution may be in as great Danger, if not greater, of being overturned, by the Parliament or the Commons their abusing their Priviledges and incroaching upon the Prerogative of the Crown, as by the King's assuming more Power than by the Laws is reserved to him.

THE happy Restoration of King Charles the 2d. of Glorious Memory, took off all those Acts of that rebellious Parliament, and restored our Constitution as intire as it was before the Rebellion; for the Nation was very sensible of the mischievous Effects of that long Parliament: Yet King Charles 2d. continued his second Parliament from 28th. of March 1661 to January 24th. 1678-9, at which Time it was dissolved by Proclamation, wherein the King declares, That, finding great Inconveniencies arising from long Continuance of Parliaments, he had resolved to dissolve that, and call a new Parliament; and no Wonder he found so, for it is scarcely possible in Nature for so great a Body of Men to continue long in Council together, without bandying themselves into Factions and Parties, to the Prejudice of either the Court or Country, both which are equally pernicious to the Body Politick, in those Assemblies the Ministry grow too familiarly acquainted with the

Members



Members, and learn the Skill of guiding them, and they of being guided, and the Hopes, of Places and Pensions, or ready Money goes a great Way to corrupt, those who have bought their Promotion to that high Trust. This Parliament for the first two or three Years went on smoothly, and healed the Breaches that had been made in our Constitution by the long Parliament, and the King being well pleased with his loyal Commons, continued them for near 18 Years. But the Earl of *Shaftsbury* and other discontented Courtiers, soon found Ways and Means to form Parties amongst them, and so vexed the King and Government with sham Plots and Conspiracies, that they had well nigh broke the Right-line, secluded the Heir apparent of the Crown, overturn'd the Government, and again involved the Nation in Confusion and a Civil War, all which was happily prevented by that Seasonable Dissolution, and by the King's great Wisdom and Prudence all the rest of his Reign. But we could never again recover that Inestimable Privilege and Security of our Liberties, The Act for Triennial Parliaments till after the happy Revolution. *K. William the 3^d* of glorious Memory continued his first Parliament for Six Years together, which wise Parliament, to obviate the Mischiefs on both Hands, that might arise either from too long Continuance, or too long Intermissions of Parliaments, both which, both King and Country had found by sad Experience, to be Intolerable, brought in the Bill for Triennial Parliaments, and his Majesty was at last prevail'd with to pass that most excellent Act, entituled, *An Act for the frequent Meeting and Calling of Parliaments*, whereby it is enacted, That from thenceforth a Parliament shall be holden once in three Years at least, from and after the Dissolution of that present Parliament, which shall cease and determine on the first Day of *November 1696*, unless sooner dissolved by their Majesties, and that from thenceforth no Parliament shall have any longer Continuance than for three Years, to be accounted from the Day on which, by the Writes such Parliament shall be appointed to meet. Which Act ought to be considered as a fundamental Law, and be Inviolable for ever. But ----- But -----

Mr. Speaker,

I must stop here, I can hardly find Words to express my Thoughts, and to Apologise for what has happened; But allow me to go on a little with my Story.

His present Majesty, than whom a more Wise, Just, Merciful, Pious, Prudent, Virtuous and Religious Prince never filled the *British* Throne, soon after His Accession, Summoned us to meet in a Triennial Parliament, and accordingly the Members were elected to serve in a Triennial Parliament; for none other was consistent with Law. Well, We pleas'd his Majesty so well, and served the Designs of the Courts so nicely, that His Majesty with the Advice of his Ministerie and Cabinet-Council thought fit to have this Triennial Act suspended, and his Loyal Commons and Parliament continued for four Years longer after expiring of the three Years appointed by the Act. But it was thought fit this should be done in a Parliamentary, In order to which a Bill was brought in and pass'd in the House, (by whose Influence and Management I cannot tell, but sure, I had no Hand in it) for continuing this Parliament for four Years longer, This Bill met with no Obstruction in the House of Lords, and the Royal Assent was easily obtained, Thus of a Triennial Parliament we turn'd our Selves into a Septennial Parliament, and might if his Majesty had thought fit turn'd our Selves into a Centennial Parliament, or as the *Old Rump* did made our Selves an Eternal Parliament.

Mr. Speaker,

It is very well that his Majesty has granted us a most gracious Indemnity and free Pardon, I say to us Members of Parliament, for I think few others are concerned in it; Otherwise I believe we might be made lyable to all the Pains and Forfeitures, to which those who endeavour the Subversion of the Government and Fundamental Laws are lyable to; For this is a plain Subversion of a Fundamental Law, and Inchoachment on the Constitution. The Parliament under *K. Henry the 8th*, by the Act above mentioned, broke the Constitution, and surrendered their whole Rights and Privileges as a Parliament, and thereby declared the King as absolute as the *Grand Signior*, and so were *Felo de se*, and we by our wise Act, have done little less, we have so shaken the Foundation, that from henceforth Parliaments shall be very precarious, and hereafter it will be a Jest to talk of Fundamentals and the Constitution, If it is thus in the Power of the Representatives of the People, so far to exceed the Trust reposed in them, as, effectually to give up the Rights

and Liberties of the People, and those very Laws by which they are secured of having any Parliaments at all. If any Parliament should think fit to give up *Magna Charta*, and renounce the Rights and Privileges of the Subject therein contain'd, I doubt not the Constituents would call such Patriots to an account for it.

Mr. Speaker,

In my humble Opinion, This Act for continuing this Parliament for four Years after the expiring of the three Years appointed by the Triennial Act, Is in it Self Null and Void, for that Moment the three Years expired, the Parliament was no Parliament, and every Act made thereafter was null and void, as null and void as those made by the Rebellious Parliament after they had broke the Constitution and usurped the Regal Power. This is the best I can make of it; but if wiser Heads can find this Act valid, I'll venture to say, It is the most pernicious Act was ever made in *England*, except that in Favours of the *South-Sea* Company, which this impowered us to make. The King's Most Gracious Pardon may indeed protect us from the Justice and Vengeance of the Laws, But what can protect our Heads, our Guilty-Heads from the just Relentments of our Constituents and Country-men, who find themselves not only betrayed and ruined in their Libertys and Privileges of a free Parliament, by our Treachery, but also Rob'd Plundered and Impoverished by our Managment, and by the abominable Avarice and fraud of those, whom we, for some small Profite to our Selves, I'm ashamed to speak of Bribery, entrusted with more Credit than all the Money in *Europe* could have answered. The Loss of Trade, The Ruin of publick Credit, and all the Mischievous Effects of the Frauds and Villanies of the *South-Sea* Directors are most justly imputable to us, who authorized and empowered them to act so Villanious a Part, and so Impoverish and destroy the Country and make us a Prey to Forreigners, that for 100 Years to come, our Loss is Irretrievable.

THE least Attonement we can make, and we may be very Teankful if it be accepted, Is, That we pass a Self denying Ordinance, and declare our Selves, at least as many as have taken any Bribes, Places or Pensions for betraying our Trusts, and have directly concurred in making the foresaid Act of Continuation, Incapable of being elected Members of Parliament, for my own part, tho' I am Conscious to my Self of having been accessorie to none of those Things, the Nation has so just Reason to complain of, yet, I am so much ashamed of what is past in this Parliament in Spite of me, I do declare I shall never in all my Life sit in Parliament, nor again accept of that high Trust, Which I have seen so horridly betrayed by my Fellow Members. If this Proposal be rejected in the House, as I doubt not it will, and if any of us shall take the Confidence, or have the Impudence to set up for being elected Members of the ensuing Parliament, the Electors will undoubtedly be so wise as to consider how we have acted in this Parliament, Reject us with Scorn, and chuse Men of Probity and Honour, who will have more regard to the Petitions and Adresses from all the Counties and Corporations of *England*, than to answer them only with an Act of Indemnity to those who are guilty of Corruption and Bribery, and other Crimes complained of.

Mr. Speaker.

I doubt not but by this Time the House is sensible, That we have already gone too far, and laid a most abominable precedent to Future Parliaments. If ever any after us shall be so foolishly wicked, as to follow our Foot-steps, either Tyranny or Anarchie must be our Fate, from both which good LORD deliver us: For preventing of which, I move.

THAT a Bill be brought in for Ratifying and Confirming for ever the Act 6to *Gullielmi et Mariae* entituled, *An Act for the frequent Meeting and Calling of Parliaments*, and for declaring the same to be a Part of our Petition of Right and a Fundamental Law of our Constitution for ever, And that it shall be high Treason for any Person or Persons, Members of Parliament or others whatsoever to propose in Parliament or in his Majesty's Privy-council, That this Parliament shall continue any longer, or that any other Parliament in Time coming shall continue longer than three Years as the said Act directs, or that shall endeavour or give Council to his Majesty to endeavour to have the said Act suspended or abrogate for ever, and for declaring, that what has been done by this present Parliament in suspending the said Act & continuing sitting after the three Years therein appointed for the Duration of every Parliament, shall not be made a Precedent nor drawn in Consequence to the Prejudice of the said Act and Fundamental Law for ever.

